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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [KMPI](#) [TS](#)

SUBJECT: A/S WELCH AND FM ABDALLAH ON IRAN, ISRAEL, SUDAN, LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador William Hudson for Reasons 1.4 b & d

¶11. (C) Summary: In a meeting March 15 in Tunis, FM Abdallah told A/S David Welch that during a recent trip to Iran he reinforced Tunisia's position supporting the peaceful use of nuclear energy, but condemning any proliferation of nuclear or chemical weapons. Abdallah claimed he petitioned his Iranian interlocutors for moderation and dialogue. Abdallah said that perhaps concern about Hamas' political future could be eased if the party was to sign on to the Arab League's Beirut declaration, despite A/S Welch's insistence that such a move was necessary, but not sufficient, because it did not explicitly recognize Israel or denounce terrorism. On a potential UN peacekeeping force for Sudan, Abdallah said Sudan's position seemed to fluctuate, and that Tunisia had little influence on Sudan. Abdallah agreed with A/S Welch that public opinion in Lebanon was strongly behind the removal of President Lahoud, due largely to his ties to Syria, but that the mechanism to do so remained to be found. (Discussion of domestic issues will be covered septel.) End Summary.

Iran

¶12. (C) Abdallah began by describing his February trip to Iran. He said that the visit had been planned "for months" and that during his trip he tried to explain the GOT position on nuclear energy and proliferation both privately and publicly at press conferences. Abdallah said the GOT is "for the peaceful and economic use of nuclear power, but is totally opposed to all proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction." Abdallah claimed that Iranian FM Manoucher Mottaki said Iran fully agreed with this position. Abdallah said he "spoke about Iran's recent actions and comments," and said that "current events were dangerous for the whole region". Abdallah said he tried to "push moderation and dialogue." Abdallah reported that in meetings with Iranian President Ahmadinejad and Expediency Council Chairman and former President Rafsanjani, neither official mentioned the nuclear issue. Abdallah concluded that it appeared there was no unified policy on the nuclear issue among the Iranian leadership. He speculated that part of the behavior stemmed from a characteristic Iranian tendency to push the limits of acceptable international behavior because of the "historic megalomania of the Iranian regime," or that the Iranians are simply lying. Finally, Abdallah noted that his conversations offered no overt signs that Iran was preparing itself for an aggressive move on the weapons front, at least "at the psychological level." A/S Welch outlined for Abdallah USG next steps on Iran in the UNSC.

¶13. (C) A/S Welch queried Abdallah whether Qatar, which is currently on the UNSC, regularly consulted with other Arab

nations to form opinion on UNSC issues, given that Qatar claims to represent Arab opinion on the council. Abdallah said that he could not speak for other Arab countries, but that Qatar had not consulted with Tunisia in the past. A/S Welch urged that Tunisia should take the initiative to make its views known to Qatar on relevant UNSC issues. Abdallah said each Arab UNSC member seemed to exercise its representation mandate differently. Algeria, for example, liked to grandstand and go off in directions that did not necessarily reflect Arab consensus. Qatar's approach was as of yet unknown. A/S Welch added that Qatar was seeking a Presidential statement on the recent incident in Jericho, and that we found such a statement unacceptable.

Israel/Hamas

¶4. (C) Turning to Hamas and the March 28-29 Arab League summit in Khartoum, A/S Welch asked what political standard the AL would establish for Hamas. Noting the view that Hamas should reinforce AL declarations supporting peace talks with Israel, A/S Welch explained that such a policy would be necessary, but not sufficient. None of these agreements explicitly accepted the existence of Israel or excluded the use of terrorism and violence as political tools.

¶5. (C) Abdallah countered that "for all Arab leaders, the recognition of Israel exists -- because of the Beirut, Tunis, and Algiers Summits." He noted that now, "no Arab leader can make a speech and say that he doesn't recognize Israel." He said that the best proof of this is that no Arab country supports Hamas without conditions; everyone agrees that Hamas has to "make necessary steps: they must reject violence and adopt new conditions as a governing party." Abdallah

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commented that such an opinion is well known "in the corridors" of the Arab League. He persisted that perhaps the solution would be for Hamas to indicate recognition of Israel through the adoption of the Beirut declaration, and emphasized that this idea was "circulating among many Arab delegations."

Sudan

¶6. (C) A/S Welch said the USG would like to see a UN peacekeeping operation in Sudan that would reinforce the current African Union peacekeeping mission. A/S Welch mentioned that some Arab countries had asked for more time to accept the idea of a Sudan UN PKO, but that the USG was uncomfortable with this answer given the ongoing conflict and the high casualties that would occur during such a delay, especially in Darfur. He explained that Darfur was of paramount importance in the U.S. both for humanitarian and political reasons.

¶7. (C) Abdallah pointed out Tunisia's long history of participation in international peacekeeping missions. He said he was somewhat confused by Sudan's position, noting that while in Cairo for the AL Foreign Ministers meeting in early March, he listened to the Sudanese minister clearly state that "should UN troops or a foreign party enter Sudan to replace or consolidate the AU mission, Sudan would withdraw from the AU." However, Abdallah said, three days later he heard from EU Commissioner Solana that Sudanese President Bashir, in a meeting with Deputy Secretary Zoellick, agreed to a UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan. He noted that Sudan's position "seems to change quite rapidly" but that at any rate Sudan would likely want to wait until at least July or August to have time to review the implications of any UN proposal. A/S Welch noted that given ongoing killings in Darfur, such a delay would be impossible for the USG and the international community to accept. Responding to a comment by A/S Welch raising the possibility of a limited, planning and logistics role for NATO in a Sudan PKO,

Abdallah said that even if NATO only provided logistical support in Sudan, it would greatly complicate, or even render impossible, a PKO proposal. Finally, Abdallah explained that Tunisia had only minimal influence on Sudan, due largely to a period of suspension of diplomatic relations that began in 1992 due to Sudan's alleged support of the banned Tunisian Islamic party En-Nahdha, considered by the GOT to be a terrorist organization. (NB: Diplomatic relations between Sudan and Tunisia were reestablished in 2000). Abdallah also commented that Libya was very concerned about Darfur, mainly because of the role of Chad.

Syria/Lebanon

¶8. (C) A/S Welch highlighted clear national consensus in Lebanon that President Lahoud, due to his ties to Syria, should no longer remain in power. A/S Welch said the USG is convinced such a move would help Lebanon. Abdallah said he was also aware of that much of the Lebanese public supported Lahoud's removal; all that remained was finding a mechanism to do so.

HUDSON